

Notes and thoughts from Washington DC trip (Feb 12th and Feb 13th) with victims and surviving family members of those who were victims of gun violence.

First off, let me say that I am not a very good writer, so please don't correct the grammar, just read these notes, facts and thoughts.

Each day we had breakfast with the Mayors Against Illegal Guns (MAIG) staff and the other victims and victims family members from gun shootings. I meet several parents who had sons and daughters murdered in class rooms at Virginia Tech, Northern Illinois University and Arizona State University. There were also many folks attending that survived their gunshot wounds from the Gabby Gifford's shooting in Phoenix, plus the Aurora Colorado movie theater shooting. There we also some parents from the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. Everyone asked each other who in their family were murdered that allowed them to be a member of this unfortunate group. Personally, I could not bring myself to try to speak with of the any of the Sandy Hook Elementary school victim's parents, the emotions seemed to fresh and raw for me to attempt a conversation.

The most surprising attendees though, were the parents, children, aunts, uncles and grandparents of a gun shooting victim. Their family members were murdered by a random gunshot, or were a victim during the commission of a crime or a victim of domestic abuse. Many of these murders occurred 5, 10 and sometimes 20 years ago. These surviving family members have been fighting the NRA and gun lobbyists in small groups or individually for many years. These gun violence victims make up the daily average of 33 Americans killed every day by guns. These incidences still make the daily news, but often don't take the national spotlight such as Sandy Hook or Virginia Tech, however that does not make these deaths any less significant or the families' grief less painful. The fact is these isolated shootings are the most common.

Tuesday (Feb, 12th) at 10 am we were all in Room 226 of Dirksen Senate Office Building as guests to listen to the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee hearing for "Proposals to Reduce Gun Violence: Protecting Our Communities While Respecting the Second Amendment". This subcommittee is chaired by (D) Dick Durbin (D) Illinois; his counterpart is Ted Cruz (R) from Texas. Other senators on this subcommittee who attended were: Charles Grassley (R) Iowa, John Cornyn (R) Texas, Lindsey Graham (R) South Carolina, Chuck Schumer (D) New York, Al Franken (D) Minnesota, Orin Hatch (R) Utah, Richard Blumenthal (D) Connecticut, Mazie Hirono (D) Hawaii and Dianne Feinstein (D) California (an invited senator, not a committee member). Before testimony was presented by the western district prosecutor (WDP), the subcommittee noted the presence in the audience of the 120 guests of MAIG. We then heard the WDP testify before the subcommittee Senators who then asked questions of the WDP. Senators Cruz and Graham made some very insensitive and rude remarks to the WDP, while we were all present. I believe the remarks by Cruz and Graham were calculated to show their disdain for some of President Obama's proposals to reduce the level of gun violence we suffer from right now. In fact, Ted Cruz made note that the two cities with the strictest gun control laws (Washington DC and Chicago) have some of the highest crime rates involving guns.

After attending this senate subcommittee hearing we went to the Executive Office Building for a briefing. We heard from VP Joe Biden's chief of staff, Bruce, followed by Elaine (not sure of her title, sorry but I believe she is part the First Lady's staff). Lastly, the First Lady came in to speak to our group. After Michelle Obama spoke she came down into the audience so we could all personally talk to her, shake her hand, get a hug and in most cases have a photo taken with her.

I am sorry I don't have last names for Bruce or Elaine. Bruce is VP Biden's point man working on these gun law measures. Bruce has been working on this issue for the last 20 years. Bruce is originally from Idaho. I was able to speak with him for a few minutes while the First Lady was meeting with the other audience members. I thanked Bruce for all the hard work he has done so far and all the hard work that will come.

During our press briefing with VP Biden's lead man Bruce, it was suggested that people use the word murdered, versus lost or taken when speaking about a victim of gun violence. Murdered is a very strong word, it certainly brings about horrible images and tragic grief, but that is in fact the case with these shootings. Hearing the word murdered can't hurt or shock more than the tragic death of a loved one. Using the word murdered stirs a strong emotion, as do these shootings, so it will lend an impact when speaking to or writing your elected official. Although there are some shootings that are accidental, these are a small percentage of the annual average of 12,000 deaths per year due to gun violence.

After our briefing ended in the Executive Building, it was followed by a dinner for all the attendees and MAIG staffers at a nearby hotel. During this dinner several MAIG lead staffers spoke to us about various gun law reform proposals. Then our group, along with the MAIG staffers went over to our hotel to watch the President's State of the Union address. Before the State of the Union address many of the 120 attendees were asked to film a commercial for the Demand A Plan organization. I did make a commercial for Demand A Plan. My message was directed to Congressman Kurt Schrader.

Wednesday (Feb, 13th) morning MAIG arranged meetings for us with our congressman and senators. In my case, I was able to meet with staff from Senator Weyden's office. Trevor Jones was on the staff members from Senator Weyden's office that we met with. We also met with Paul Gage, Kurt Schrader's chief of staff. Paul Gage told us in our meeting that he has had a family member murdered by an assailant with a gun. In both meetings, the staff did listen to our stories. MAIG wanted each of us to tell our story, to put a face and personal touch for each gun shooting. I also hand delivered the letters from friends and family to these staffers. MAIG attorney Alex Walden accompanied us during our meetings with legislative staff.

Facts to note:

1. According to recent statistics, on average there are 33 Americans killed each day by gun violence. Do the math $33 \text{ people} \times 365 \text{ days} = 12,045 \text{ people per year}$.
2. 6.6 million guns were sold in the US last year, of those 40% occurred without a background check. Do the math: $.40 \times 6.6 \text{ million} = 2.6 \text{ million guns sold without a back ground check}$.
3. A recent study of gun sales that occurred with background checks, found 1.7% of the buyers failed the background check. Do the math: $1.7\% \times 2.6 \text{ million guns} = 44,880 \text{ gun buyers could have failed a background check, thus leaving them without a gun}$.
4. The 9 year old girl fatally shot at the Phoenix Safeway with Congresswoman Gabby Gifford's was killed by the 13th bullet of the shooters 9mm Glock handgun. That 9mm Glock had 17 bullets per magazine.
5. Federally licensed gun dealers are required by law to run a background check on each gun buyer. For example this includes local gun shops, Dicks Sporting Goods, Cabala's and even Walmart.
6. A "gun collector" at a gun show does not have to run a background check on a buyer, unless state law or a local jurisdiction requires it. A recent survey of prison inmates found that 80% of them bought a weapon without a background check being performed. I would assume that many of these prison inmates bought a gun at a local gun show from a "gun collector" or perhaps purchased the gun illegally, borrowed the gun or stole the gun, since they know they would not pass a background check.
7. From 1934 to 2004 the ban on the sale of assault style weapons was never struck down by any court.
8. 82% of gun owners – including 74% of NRA members support requiring a criminal background check for anyone purchasing a gun.
9. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia has stated that 2nd amendment rights are not unlimited, these rights do come with responsibility.
10. In Australia in 1996 35 people were murdered by an assailant armed with an AR-15. After that incident, the sales of assault weapons were banned in Australia. Then the Australian government did a buyback program of assault weapons, they haven't had a mass shooting since.
11. There are 129,817 federally licensed firearms dealers in the US. 61,562 of those are "gun" collectors, 7,356 are pawnshops and 51,438 are gun stores and licensed retailers.
12. Ranking of guns per capita: #1 United States, #2 Yemen, #3 Switzerland, #4 Finland and #5 Serbia.
13. There were 55 million gun owning voters in 2008.
14. There is an estimated 310 million firearms in civilian circulation here in the US.
15. There were over 5.4 million firearms manufactured in the US in 2010. 95% of these guns were manufactured for sale to the US market.
16. There were over 3.2 million firearms imported into the US in 2010.
17. In 1993 there were 18,253 gun homicides, 18,940 gun suicides, 1,521 accidental gun deaths and another 882 gun deaths due to undetermined reasons.

18. In 2011, there were 11,101 gun homicides, 19,766 gun suicides, 851 accidental gun deaths and another 445 gun deaths due to undetermined reasons.
19. 45, the number of rounds an AR-15 is capable of firing per minute in semiautomatic mode.
20. 49% of US homes have a gun according to a January 2013 survey.
21. 78% is the minimum shooting-range hit rate a NYPD officer needs to pass firearms training.
22. Average NYPD hit rate statistics from 1998 to 2006 when an officer is in a gun fight. When the target does not fire back, the NYPD officer hit rate is 30%. When the target fires back at officers, their hit rate drops to 18%. Even NYPD officers with their level training are not that successful when under fire. So you can see that the NRA's proposal to arm teachers and college professors is an absurd notion for many reasons.
23. Below is the 2nd Amendment with the preamble.

"A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

I was told by MAIG staffers that letters from voters carry the most weight with elected officials. Order of importance: #1-Letters, #2 e-mail and least impactful are phone calls. MAGV feels pretty confident that the senate is in favor and will pass the proposed legislation promoted by the President. The road block lies in the house, which is controlled by the Republicans. It is especially important to write to your own federal congressman, senators and the leaders listed below.

- a. Vice President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20501
- b. House Majority Leader Mr. Eric Cantor
303 Cannon H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515
- c. Senate Minority Leader Mr. Mitch McConnell
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
- d. Speaker of the House Mr. John Boehner
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515
- e. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid
522 Hart Senate Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20510
- f. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi
235 Cannon H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515

g. President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500-0004

The short list of leaders to write would include: Senator Harry Reid (D) Nevada, as he is a strong supporter of the NRA. John Boehner (R) Ohio, and Eric Cantor (R) Virginia, because of their leadership positions in the House. The House is where the toughest opposition will come from for gun law reforms.

I will try to get information from MAIG showing the grade the NRA has given Senators and Congressman from Oregon, Colorado, Washington, Michigan, California, Arizona, Maryland, Idaho and Texas. Once I get this information I'll pass it along to you in an e-mail. My own congressman, Kurt Schrader who is a democrat, unfortunately carries an A rating from the NRA.

One of the primary reasons the efforts to make necessary changes to gun laws is so strong now, is because of the support and backing of New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg. His estimated net worth is \$25 billion. He has deep pockets, in other words he has strong financial resources to fight the NRA and the gun industry lobbyists. Mayor Bloomberg can and has offer financial support to candidates that oppose pro NRA and gun industry legislation. This level of financial backing for gun law reforms has never been available until Mayor Bloomberg stepped up. Here is a quote by Mayor Bloomberg "The NRA is only powerful if you let them be powerful". Mayor Bloomberg is the founder of Mayors Against Gun Violence. MAIG was founded in 2006. MAIG has more than 850 mayors who have joined the group, plus now has over 1 million other supporters like myself.

When Vice President Biden was in the senate 20 years ago, he authored the bill that continued the ban on the sale of assault style weapons. The bill he had passed extended the ban on the sale of the assault weapons from 1994 to 2004. Vice president Biden has been fighting the sale of assault weapons for about 20 years too. VP Biden has shown strong support for these new initiatives and has many years of experience to draw on to promote these proposals.

Below is a list of some websites that will provide you with more information on this issue, as well as ways you can personally help persuade your elected officials to do the right thing.

<http://smartgunlaws.org/>

<http://www.mayorsagainstillegalguns.org/html/home/home.shtml>

<http://www.facebook.com/AmericansForResponsibleSolutions>

<http://americansforresponsiblesolutions.org/>

<http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Second+Amendment>

<http://www.reinstatetheban.org>

www.demandaplan.org

PBS aired a Frontline program on Adam Lanza's mother and then the gathering of news stories about the shootings. In it, the President of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, located in Newtown, espoused the need for safe gun storage. Here is their statement after the Newtown shooting:

<http://www.nssf.org/newsroom/news/statement.cfm>

You can download the NSSF brochure on gun safety which includes safe storage and locking device information too.

Article about the NRA versus pediatricians:

http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/medical_examiner/2013/02/pediatricians_and_nra_physician_gag_rules_and_the_cdc_aca_and_states.html

Suggestions I can offer to you:

1. Write your congressman and senators. Write them every couple of months.
2. Attend your congressman and senators town hall meetings when they are back in their home state.
3. Contact the various organizations through their websites listed above. Ask them how you can help.
4. If you can, donate money to these organizations so they can continue to push for responsible and reasonable changes to our gun laws.
5. Ask for a meeting with your congressman's staff to tell your story. Remember to thank the staffers for the meeting and be professional so that your message is heard.
6. Ask your state and federal legislators to provide adequate funding for the National Instant Criminal Check System. This is the system that contains information for gun purchase background checks.
7. Ask your state and federal legislators to provide funding so states can report information to the NICS system on felons, those under a restraining order and individuals who are under psychiatric care that are a determined to be a danger to themselves and others.

The following are some of my own opinions and thoughts on this issue.

1. I do not understand how a background check will keep any law abiding citizen from purchasing a gun. It is my understanding that if you are a convicted felon, or are under care for certain psychiatric conditions, or are restricted by a restraining order that you will not pass a background check. The background check is only supposed to keep an unstable person or a convicted felon from buying a gun legally, not a citizen in good standing.
2. Before Steve was shot, I had purchased a rifle for Nathan's 16th birthday. I had to go through a background check during this purchase at Dick's Sporting Goods. The background check only took about 5 to 10 minutes and cost \$10.
3. I own a hunting rifle and have gone deer hunting in the past. I know from my own experience that an AR-15 and other assault style guns are not necessary for hunting. You simply don't get more than one or two shots at a deer, elk, etc.
4. Oregon does not have a safe storage gun law, many states do. I wonder if Steve might still be here today if the AR-15 used at the Clackamas Town Center (CTC) shooting had been locked up in a gun safe? The CTC shooter stole the AR-15 from a friend. The AR-15 owner had purchased the gun legally, but didn't securely store it.
5. I hope that one day it becomes a federal law to store a gun and ammunition safely and securely.

6. Nowhere in the country can you buy or sell a car without registering it with a state DMV, why can't we do the same thing with guns?
7. No one can obtain a driver's license without passing a written test and practical test. It seems logical that there ought to be similar requirements and education before you are allowed to buy a gun.
8. I would personally oppose any ban on the sale of standard hunting rifles or shotguns.
9. The NRA and gun industry lobbyists persuade federal and state level legislators with campaign money or implicit threats of supporting an opposing candidate, but the NRA and lobbyists can't write or pass the laws and regulations. Laws and regulations can only be written and passed by our elected officials; our elected officials can't pass the blame along for poor gun laws and regulations on the NRA or other lobbyists. We need to hold our legislators responsible for their votes on upcoming legislative votes.

I would welcome any additions or comments of these notes to share with others.

Below are a few photos from the Washington DC trip.



Photo 1 - First Lady meeting with MAIG guests at the Executive Building.



Photo 2 -Thanking Bruce and VP Biden for all the work they have done to this point.



Photo 3 - (left to right) Alex Walden, Bryant Cephus, Paul Gage and Teresa Raiford meeting in Congressman's Kurt Schrader's office.



Figure 4 - Kurt Schrader's lead judiciary staffer and I during our meeting with Paul Gage to tell our families story.